



Montgomery County Council

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Contact: Patrick Lacefield 240-777-7939 or Jean Arthur 240-777-7934

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COUNCIL APPROVES CHANGES IN COUNTY TAXICAB REGS TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER SERVICE, BOOST COMPETITION

The Montgomery County Council today gave unanimous approval to changes in County regulations affecting the taxicab industry designed to improve customer service, inject more competition into the industry, and better serve vulnerable populations.

The bill sets new goals for passenger service. Residents should be picked up within 10 minutes of the scheduled time for pre-arranged trips and within 20 minutes for calls for immediate service. Future regulations will identify the percentage of trips that must meet these objectives, and the County will issue annual reports detailing companies' performance on these and other customer service measures. Companies will also develop procedures to keep customers informed of the status of their trip requests. In addition, the County is establishing a "mystery rider" program, designed to provide ongoing tests of customer service.

"The meter has been running on reform of our County's taxicab industry for too long," said Councilmember Nancy Floreen, chair of the Council's Transportation & Environment Committee. "I've heard from many residents who have been frustrated by cabs that show up late or not at all. Montgomery County residents deserve to have a cab come when they call and deserve competent and professional service for their money. Our senior and disabled residents, and those with medical conditions, often depend on cab service as their lifeline to the world. We shouldn't let them down."

Companies will be held responsible for the actions of drivers who are independent contractors. Companies will have to set up systems to mediate complaints from passengers and disputes with their own drivers.

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page two

The law also will change the system of temporary driver ID cards, held by half the drivers now on the road, by requiring an applicant to verify his or her identity, pass a taxi examination and undergo at least one criminal background check. After March 1, 2006, an applicant will need to pass the national criminal background check, and temporary ID cards will be phased out.

The bill approved by the Council will allow the issuance of up to 70 new licenses in 2005. It allows the director of the County Department of Public Works and Transportation to increase the number of licenses by a maximum of 10 percent every two years thereafter.

Any company holding 40% or more of the total number of taxi licenses can receive a maximum of 10 new licenses in any two-year period and other companies cannot transfer licenses to any such "dominant player." In addition, taxi companies outside the County will be able to compete on a level playing field for new licenses.

The new bill takes effect 90 days after enactment.

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